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ABSTRACT

This paper describes W.A.S.H. (We All Speak Here), an experiential learning strategy that provides learners (individuals or groups) with a means for exploring, discussing, and discovering their thoughts and feelings on any idea, issue, or concept. This strategy is part of a larger model in which students develop a deeper understanding of learning materials, create stronger personal meaning with the subject matter, and incorporate this knowledge more readily into their lives. W.A.S.H. is flexible and may be used in a variety of ways: to examine classroom issues, to set a course or direction for the next classroom experience, to practice decision-making skills, or to practice recording and reporting. The design involves a series of four questions: "why" (concrete experience), "what" (reflective observation), "how" (abstract conceptualization), and "what if" (active experimentation). The participants, in small groups, generate a list of as many responses as possible to each question during a set time limit. Once the list has been generated for a particular question, the group prioritizes the responses to the question. These responses are then reported by each group and recorded on a large sheet of newsprint as a permanent record. The importance of carefully wording questions and guiding groups in prioritizing responses is emphasized. An example uses the W.A.S.H. strategy during an introduction to Space Science and includes a sample script used by the facilitator to generate group discussion and record responses. (LP)

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By Michael J. St. John

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Author's notes: An Introduction

This monograph provides the reader with a glimpse into the workings of [1]A Learning Model classroom. A Learning Model has evolved over the past 17 years. This model engages students through carefully designed learning experiences. These experiences create an environment where students take responsibility for their learning; for what they say and do.

A Learning Model classroom allows students to develop a deeper understanding of the material to be learned, create stronger personal meaning with the subject matter, and incorporate this knowledge more readily into their lives. To accomplish this, A Learning Model utilizes strategies that place the center of educational gravity within the student. Ownership, collaboration, and the opportunity to make meaning of their world are the active ingredients of understanding and learning.

The strategies to engage students into their learning, the techniques to design learning experiences, and the methods to assess both student learning and performance have been created, tested, and refined in the classrooms of the co-authors of this approach to learning.

The W.A.S.H. (We All Speak Here) is one of many strategies created and utilized in A Learning Model. This strategy is simple, flexible, and may be used in and with a wide variety of audiences, age groups, and settings. The W.A.S.H. strategy is presented here with instructions that will allow for its facilitation with any gathering of learners.

History, Development and Purpose

The [2]W.A.S.H., as A Learning Model strategy, was originally developed in 1988. It is a strategy that provides a community of learners a common experiential reference point about any given topic. It is a strategy that provides a community of learners (individuals, small groups, or large groups) an avenue to explore, discuss, and discover

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thoughts, and feelings about the question. Once the list has been generated for that particular question, the group will now prioritize the one, two, or three responses that they feel are the most appropriate responses to the question. These responses are then reported by each group and are recorded on a large sheet of newsprint as a permanent record of the W.A.S.H.

The cycle of W.A.S.H. questions are based on the work on Learning Styles and Brain Hemisphericity by David A. Kolb and Dr. Bernice McCarthy. [4]Kolb's work concludes that people learn through their experiences and that this process is conceived as a four-stage cycle. Kolb's model of experiential learning incorporates Carl Jung's concept of style and type.

Therefore, as humans, we learn by "perceiving and processing" our experiences. These experiences, whether in the classroom environment or in our personal lives requires the learner to establish some concrete feelings about the issue at hand as well as conceptualizing about this issue. These experiences require the learner to reflect on this issue as well as actively experiment with this issue. These concepts; concrete feelings, conceptualization, reflection, and active experimentation are the basis for the theory of experiential learning and its four major learning styles.

In regards to these four major Learning Styles or Types, Dr. McCarthy's [5]4MAT Learning System states that the type one learner's favorite question is "Why?" the type two learners question is "What?" the type three's is "How?" and type four's question is "What if?" Therefore these questions, why? what? how?, and what if? will set the basis for the cycle in the W.A.S.H. questions. It is extremely important that the cycle follows this pattern. This pattern always starts with the "why?" question (Concrete experience), then the "what?" (Reflective observation), the "How?" (Abstract conceptualization), and ends with the "what if?" (Active experimentation).

Crafting the Questions and Prioritizing the Responses

Although the cycle of questions seems simple enough, you should be extremely careful in crafting the questions. One word in the question may very well set the groups off in a direction you did not necessarily intend upon. An example would be if you were having your classroom community examine the issue of the importance of "school". The question "why did we create schools?" will create a different direction than the question "why do we have schools?" Keep in mind that the participants of this W.A.S.H. will be relying on their own concrete experience to generate responses to this first question.

Another example of carefully crafting the questions is evident in the last question of the cycle, the "what if?" This question may be framed in a positive nature or a negative

nature depending on the pre-determined direction that you want the group to travel while examining an issue. While WASH-ing the issue of "trust", the question, "what if no one could be trusted?" (Negative) versus "what if you wanted to be trusted?" (Positive) will set that direction.

Another interesting outcome of the last question is that the crafting of the question may change the pronoun the group is using while generating their responses. During the responses on the question "what if no one could be trusted?", the negative view of this issue, the pronoun used by the individuals in the group while generating their list of responses would be "we would." Whereas, on the positive approach, "what if you wanted to be trusted?" the individuals in the group would be using the expression "I would". Crafting the last question in this manner makes the groups list of responses more personal to each member and to the community.

Also, when the group is called upon to prioritize their responses, the prioritization intent is controlled by the adjective used and by the intended direction of the W.A.S.H. When asking to prioritize their list of responses instead of most important or least important you might use:

- Most/least interesting
- Most/least significant
- Most/least unusual
- Most/least helpful, etc.

The setting should be small groups of three to five participants. Each group is given a sheet of composition paper to write down their responses to the pre-designed W.A.S.H. questions. If you feel it is necessary to collect this sheet of paper from each group for an assessment, then all group members names should be clearly written at the top of this paper along with any other pertinent record keeping data.

You will also need a large sheet of newsprint or chart pack paper in order to record the groups prioritized responses. Four different colored markers clearly delineate the responses to the Why, What, How, and What If questions.

Facilitating the W.A.S.H.

Many adjustments were made through reflective practice that focused on how the W.A.S.H. questions were delivered to the groups by the facilitator. It will be easier to demonstrate this facilitation by writing it in script form and providing you with a clear picture of this delivery.

One thing you will notice in the following script is that the phrase, a list of your best responses is never used in the crafting or delivery of the W.A.S.H. question.

thoughts and feelings on any idea, issue, concern, concept or misinterpretation that is facing a learning community.

This strategy has gone through a process of change and refinement and several components of the W.A.S.H. were examined and reworked. These components; a) types of questions and their order of delivery; b) the setting, the timing, and the pace; c) the recording of the group's responses and; d) the framing of the questions to elicit the groups prioritized responses; make the W.A.S.H a powerful strategy.

The W.A.S.H.'s power lies in its flexibility and versatility. It is easy to use and may be used in a variety of ways. Some examples are:

- Restructuring the student's [3]internal experiential framework.
- Examining classroom issues.
- As an introductory lecture to an up-coming classroom experience.
- As a summation to a classroom experience.
- To investigate what the students already know.
- Students discovering what they already know.
- To set a course or direction for the next classroom experience.
- As a discussion tool.
- As a way to practice idea-generation.
- To practice decision-making and to develop a rationale for that decision.
- Practicing prioritization
- Practicing recording and reporting

When used properly, the power in the W.A.S.H. allows a learning community to generate (with a little practice) at least one hundred ideas, thoughts, and feelings on any given issue in about 20 minutes. This power is derived from a design that allows a learning community to view the same issue from four different intellectual perspectives in a short period of time. Also, for example, if the W.A.SH. is being used as an introductory lecture for an up-coming classroom experience or activity, the classroom community would have, when the W.A.S.H. ended, a completed hard copy of this introduction that was totally developed by the needs and experiences of that classroom community.

Types of Questions and their Delivery

The essence of a W.A.S.H. is to design a series or sequence of four questions that complete a cycle about a particular issue or idea. The participants, in small groups, will generate a list of as many responses as possible to these questions during a set time limit. This is similar to formal brainstorming and will follow the same rules. In a short period of time (one, maybe two minutes) each group will generate and share many ideas,

When this expression, "your best" is used the participants apply a self-evaluation to their ideas and it severely limits idea-generation by the groups.

Also this script is fairly generic. When facilitating a W.A.S.H., the vocabulary and tone of the script should be appropriately adjusted to meet the needs and ages of the members of any particular learning community or gathering.

This demonstration of facilitating the W.A.S.H questions, the instructions to the participants, and timing used by the facilitator will be featured by using a W.A.S.H. as an introduction to Space Science or as an introduction to the Social Issues of Space Exploration and Funding. Therefore one possible sequence of W.A.S.H. questions might be; "Why do we (humans) explore outer space? What is space exploration? How do we explore outer space? What if you were asked to explore outer space or What if you were asked to support funding for space exploration?" Keep in mind the "What If?" question is going to allow the participants to actively experiment in their minds with the issue at hand.

Once groups are established with the necessary materials, the verbal delivery would be as follows:

"Are all groups ready!" (Check) "I will be asking you and your group a series of questions. I need you and your group to react to these questions by providing a list of responses to the questions. Therefore, each group now needs to select a recorder and reporter." (Check)

"Recorders, your job is to record all responses that the individuals in your group generate. You are not to evaluate any response. You must record it. You may also share your responses if you have any."

"Reporters, you will be called upon to report the responses of your group to the rest of the community."

"If all groups are ready" (check) "Here are the instructions. You and your group will have one minute (time will vary) to come up with a list of as many responses as possible to the following question during this time".

"Ready! Why do we (humans) explore outer space? You have one minute, Go!"

"Time!

At this point in the W.A.S.H. and before the groups prioritize their list, you may feel it is necessary to have the groups count and report the number of responses they generated in one minute. This will allow you to make the point that the group's purpose is to generate, not only quality, appropriate responses, but also quantity, as many responses as

possible in a short period of time. This quick inventory from each group on the number of ideas that they have generated per question increases the awareness of the responsibility of the group.

"Now you and your group need to decide from your list of responses the TWO (number may vary) you feel are the most important responses to the question, Why do we explore outer space? You have one minute to make your decisions. Also, on your paper, please circle or underline your two responses, Go!"

"Time! Reporters please, group one."

On a large sheet of newsprint titled Space Exploration, write the word, "WHY" at the top and record all reporter's prioritized responses to the first question. Leave enough room on this sheet of newsprint for the responses of the remaining three questions.

"Second question, but first, please change recorders and change reporters!" (Check)

"Ready!"

Repeat this delivery for the remaining three questions to complete the W.A.S.H.

In Conclusion

Several points should be kept in mind while delivering and recording the W.A.S.H. questions and responses. First, you should notice that the pace of the W.A.S.H. is quite lively. Any more than three minutes (average response time is two minutes) per question and per prioritization diminishes the intent and effect of the W.A.S.H. The pace (time) regulation and management is controlled by the facilitator. Time may increase or decrease without notice depending on the nature of the groups, the questions, the group discussion, and the purpose.

Second, the change in recorders and reporters after each question validates each group member and allows them to feel responsible for the task at hand. When collecting the group's reporting sheets for assessment, the facilitator should be stressing the quality of the document that each group member is writing along with the quantity and quality of the responses each member is generating during the W.A.S.H.

Thirdly, at the end of the W.A.S.H. and considering the topic used in the sample script, space science; the facilitator has a variety of choices for the direction and activity of the learning community. Some of these choices may be:

- An open discussion by the learning community on this topic.
- An activity that encourages research on satellites and rockets.
- An activity that encourages research on locations to explore in our Solar System.

- Debates on funding space exploration.
- An activity that examines the effects of space exploration on human biology, etc.

The W.A.S.H. has provided the members of the learning community a common active experience that will be utilized by the individual as an experiential foundation for future activities.

Finally, the W.A.S.H. strategy provides the individuals of any given learning community the opportunity to discuss with one another in a small group setting any subject matter that is going to be learned, any subject matter that has been learned, and any issues, concerns, or problems facing that learning community. The reports from the small groups to the community at-large allow all members the chance to hear, feel, and think about what this learning community is feeling and thinking about the topics at hand. The W.A.S.H strategy allows the learning community to talk about the thoughts and feelings of their learning community.

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